

## HAIMO OF AUXERRE, *Commentarius in Cantica canticorum*

In Latin, decorated manuscript on parchment

Italy, northern, c. 1200-1230

59 folios on parchment, somewhat stiff, modern foliation in pencil, bottom, outer, corner (collation, i-vii<sup>8</sup> viii<sup>3</sup> [structure uncertain, no loss of text]), horizontal catchwords quires one, two and seven, no leaf and quire signatures, ruled lightly in lead with the top two and single bottom ruled lines full across; double full-length vertical bounding lines, some prickings remain, top margin (justification 102-98 x 60-56 mm.), written above the top line by two scribes, first scribe, ff. 1-51, in an upright gothic bookhand influenced by chancery script, in twenty-seven to twenty-three long lines, with additional single vertical bounding lines in red ink, flanking the text, and in the far inside and outside margins, majuscules in the text touched with red, rubric in red, f. 1, two- to one-line red initials, six-line red initial, f. 1, with decorative infilling, and with a double red circle circumscribing the initial, filled with pale yellow, biblical text copied in the margins, surrounded by double red circles or triangles, filled with pale yellow, and decorated with red dots, second scribe, ff. 52-59, (f. 59v, blank), in an upright gothic bookhand in twenty-four to twenty-one long lines, majuscules in the text touched with pale yellow, angle-brackets within text decorated in black and pale yellow, biblical text in the margin, surrounded by double red circles, filled with yellow and/or red, in excellent condition, with slight stains, top, outer margin, ff. 1-6, with no damage to the text, outer margin cut away, f. 36, leaving the text intact. Bound in a fifteenth-century (?) undecorated black leather binding over wooden boards, sewn on two bands, undecorated head and tail bands, smooth spine. The binding is in good condition, with no signs of any modern repairs or other interventions, with some worm holes, front and back covers, and wear along the edges and at the corners. Dimensions 148 x 100 mm.

The Song of Songs inspired numerous biblical commentaries during the Middle Ages. This is a fine early thirteenth-century copy of the commentary by the ninth-century author, Haimo of Auxerre. Migne's nineteenth-century printed edition of the text reproduces a sixteenth-century edition; there is no modern critical edition. This copy, in an intriguingly small format, offers an innovative (and possibly unique?) solution to the problem of including both the biblical text and the commentary: the scribes copied the biblical lemmata in the margins, enclosed in decorative circles and other shapes.

### PROVENANCE

1. Written in the early thirteenth century, probably in northern Italy, as indicated by the script and codicological features; both scribes write variations of gothic bookhands, with letter unions and other features supporting a date in the thirteenth century; they begin each page on the top ruled line, which is generally a feature found early in the century, often before c. 1230. The fact that the scribes did not use the modern biblical chapters (they

were added in the margins) also supports a date before ca. 1230. The manuscript belonged to St. Peter's in Savigliano in the fifteenth century (see below), and the general features of the script and decorative features suggest it was probably also copied in northern Italy.

2. Belonged to the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter's in Savigliano, where it was "31" in their library: ownership note, f. 1, bottom margin, s. XV: "Iste liber est monachorum congregationis sancte Iustine ordinis benedicti de obseruantia deputatus monasterio sancti petri de sauiliano signum numero 31"; and top margin, in ink, in another hand: "31." San Pietro in Savigliano, which is located in Piedmont, Italy, about thirty-two miles south of Turin, is traditionally said to have been founded in 585 by St. Faustus, a disciple of St. Benedict. The monastery was destroyed in the tenth century, but rebuilt in 1028, and continued into modern times. In the fifteenth century it was one of the Italian Benedictine monasteries in the Congregation of St. Justina of Padua.

## TEXT

ff. 1-58, *Sapientissimi salomonis liber et hic incipit de canticis canticorum*. "Osculetur me osculo oris sui [Cant. 1:1]," Salamon [*sic*] inspiratus diuino spiritu composuit hunc libellum de nupciis christi et ecclesie et quomodo epithalamicum [*sic*] fecit christi et ecclesie ... Hinc et apostolus de se sibi que similibus dicit, "Nostra conuersacio in celis est [Philippians 3:20]," et alibi, "Christus bonus odor sumus in omni loco [II Corinthians 2:15]"; f. 58 [Prayer] Christus et nobis sua gratia prestare dignetur. Vt odore virtutem referti et bonorum operum cultu redimiti ... Que preparauit deus diligentibus se, cui est cum patre et sancto spiritu uirtus et potestas honor et imperium per infinita seculorum. Amen. *Liber cantica canticorum explicit*. ff. 58v-59 [Accessus to Song of Songs] Vt facilius ad textum sit aditus et singula que per totum libri textum ... Videlicet auctoris materia scribentis intentio legentis utilitas et quis titulos. Est autem materia sponsus et sponsa id est christus et ecclesia ... id est omnimoda speciali coniunctione christi et ecclesie.

Haimo of Auxerre, *Commentarius in Cantica canticorum* (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*); edited in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia latina*, Paris, 1841-61, 117:295-358 from the Cologne, 1529 edition, where it is attributed to Haimo of Halberstadt, and in Migne, *Patrologia latina* 70:1055-1106 from the 1538 edition, published in Freiburg im Breisgau, where it is attributed to Cassiodorus; see Fridericus Stegmüller, *Repertorium biblicum medii aevi*. Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1950-1980, nos. 3079, listing this text as Pseudo-Haimo of Halberstadt, with a summary of the various medieval attributions.

Although recent scholars attribute this commentary to Haimo of Auxerre, it has circulated under the names of numerous authors. Manuscript attributions during the Middle Ages, in addition to Haimo, include Remigius Altissiodorensis, Cassiodorus, and Thomas Aquinas. The attribution to Haimo of Halberstadt probably dates to the Johannes Trithemius (1462-1561), who conflated Haimo of Auxerre with his contemporary, Haimo of Halberstadt. Many manuscripts, like this one, are anonymous (for a review of the various attributions, and the current attribution to Haimo of Auxerre, see Matter, *Voice of My Beloved*, p. 119, notes 64 and 65, and Guglielmetti, 2006, xxxiv).

The text here concludes with a prayer not printed in Migne, also found in Trinity College Dublin, MS 346 (C.5.5), an English copy of this commentary from the end of the twelfth or early thirteenth

century (see Marvin L. Colker. *Trinity College Library, Dublin, A Descriptive Catalogue of the Mediaeval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, Aldershot, England, Scolar Press, 1991, p. 710). The accessus, or introduction, to the Song of Songs, following the commentary on ff. 58v-59, is unidentified.

The lovely, secular, and frankly erotic poem, the Song of Songs, or *Cantica canticorum*, presented special challenges to medieval commentators. As a modern historian, E. Ann Matter, has noted, "... on the surface, it tells no sacred history, makes no theological or moral points, and does not mention God" (Matter, 1990, p. 49). Nonetheless its popularity during the Middle Ages is undeniable, and nearly one hundred different commentaries on the Song of Songs were written between the sixth and the fifteenth centuries (Matter, p. 3; see also p. 6, where she states that the Song of Songs was "the most frequently interpreted book of medieval Christianity"). Medieval commentaries interpreted the book allegorically in a number of different ways; for example, the poem was seen as an exploration of the heavenly marriage between Christ and the Church, or between Christ and the human soul, or as an exploration of the nature of Divine love between Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Of the many medieval commentaries on the Song of Songs, the ninth-century Commentary by Haimo of Auxerre was the most popular and widely disseminated. Haimo of Auxerre (fl. ca. 840-860) was a Benedictine monk from the Abbey of St.-Germain at Auxerre, an important center of learning, and especially of biblical exegesis. In addition to this commentary on the Song of Songs, Haimo was the author of commentaries on the Apocalypse, the Minor Prophets, and possibly the Pauline Epistles, and many sermons.

Haimo's commentary was ideally suited to the classroom, and its popularity can be explained by its straightforward and didactic approach, which focuses on the Song of Songs as an allegory of Christ and the Church. His commentary was simple enough to appeal to the monastic world of the ninth century, and to both monastic and secular audiences later in the Middle Ages. His skillful use of many earlier authors doubtless added to its appeal. Later in the Middle Ages, commentaries on the Song of Songs stressed a more complex, spiritual interpretation of the biblical text, focusing on the love of Christ and the human soul.

The surviving manuscripts testify to the continued popularity of Haimo's commentary throughout the Middle Ages. A recent survey has identified 130 extant manuscripts, not including this one; only two of these manuscripts are in the United States (see Guglielmetti, 2006, pp. xxxiv-xxxv, and pp. 317-320). Yet, in spite of the large number of extant manuscripts, its appearance on the market seems to be relatively rare. Schoenberg's Database records only five copies of the commentary attributed to Haimo of Auxerre and one other listed simply as "biblical commentary." However, given the fact that Haimo's text circulated under so many different names, and often anonymously, there may well have been more.

The layout of this notably small-format copy of the Commentary is especially interesting. In medieval copies of commentaries on the Bible, the biblical text commented on was often copied within the text, sometimes highlighted by a colored initial, underlining, or by the use of a different size or type of script. Here, in a layout that may be unique, the lemmata are copied in the margins alongside the appropriate place in the commentary, within decorative circles, triangles, or other

geometric shapes. The Song of Songs was divided into the eight chapters still used today in the early thirteenth century, perhaps by Stephen Langton. These chapters were in widespread use in Bibles and commentaries after c. 1230; a medieval hand has added these "modern" chapter numbers in the margin of this commentary, which originally had no references to chapter numbers of modern or earlier systems.

## LITERATURE

Guglielmetti, Rossana E. *La tradizione manoscritta dei commenti latini al cantico dei cantici (Origini-XII secolo). Repertorio dei codici contenenti testi inediti o editi solo nell' 'Patrologia latina'*, Florence, SISMEI, 2006.

Matter, E. Ann. *The Voice of My Beloved. The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

Ohly, Friedrich. *Hobeliad-Studien: Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hobeliadauslegung des Abendlandes bis um 1200* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1958).

Riedlinger, Helmut. *Die Makellosigkeit der Kirche in den Lateinischen Hobeliadkommentaren des Mittelalters. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters. Texte und Untersuchungen 38, 3*, Münster, West. Aschendorff, 1958.

Turner, Denys. *Eros and Allegory. Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*. Cistercian Studies Series 156, Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications, 1995.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Gietmann, G., "Canticle of Canticles," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, Robert Appleton, 1908  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03302a.htm>

Rette Civica del Comune di Savigliano:  
Historical Notes

<http://www.comune.savigliano.cn.it/servizi/menu/dinamica.aspx?idArea=18069&idCat=18097&ID=18097>

and San Pietro Abbey Complex:

<http://www.comune.savigliano.cn.it/servizi/menu/dinamica.aspx?idArea=18069&idCat=18712&ID=19334>